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"War balloons sail through the air followed by anxious
and frightened glances." The Harvest, Page 5

*From the painting by Julien Dupré,
in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

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THE HARVEST

SUMMER has bound up her golden tresses and left the earth which she held so long in her hot and fierce embrace, and now comes glorious autumn, coloring gorgeously the wooded hills, ripening the vines, mellowing the fruits, and bringing with it the happiness and rejoicing of the harvest season. From remote ages Harvest has been the great holiday of mankind, the season when the toilworn hands of the sons of the earth were filled plentifully with the gifts of nature and when hearts have overflowed with thankfulness to whatever deity they might worship. More than this, Harvest was to the ancients a season of mysterious awe, when magic rites were performed and when to the groping mind of Man came some comprehension of the great mysteries of Life and Death and of the supreme sacrifice of Life that new Life may be created.

The old Egyptian reaper, when he gathered his harvest uttered strange cries, announcing thus the death of the corn-spirit, the rustic prototype of Osiris. But out of the death of the corn-spirit new life was created, and this idea of the sacredness of sacrifice, and of life-creating death has touched the imagination of mankind throughout the world in all ages. The many curious harvest-customs found in

all parts of the world where grain and corn are gathered, and the toiler reaps thankfully what he has sown, have their origin in this idea of sacrifice, though it may now be long forgotten, and what were once strange and holy rituals, disintegrated into merely superstitious and often apparently absurd customs.

In West Russia, a figure is made out of the last sheaf of corn and a boy is wrapped in it. The woman who binds this sheaf represents the "corn-mother," and she goes through an elaborate simulation of death-cries and mortal pains, while the boy in the sheaf squalls like a new born child, and, on his liberation, is wrapped in swaddling bands. Here the basic idea finds a fairly clear expression: the corn-mother must die, but the corn-child lives through the death of the mother. Less clear, yet unmistakably influenced by the same spiritual source is the custom in some parts of Scotland to keep the last sheaf of grain till the first mare foals and to offer it then to her as her first food.

In Northumberland, where the harvest rejoicing takes place at the close of the reaping and not at the ingathering, the reapers make out of the last sheaf a "kern-baby," an image formed of a wheat-sheaf, dressed in a white frock and colored rib-

bons and hoisted on a pole. This "kern-baby" is the harvest-queen, and it is carried back in triumph with music and shouting and set up in a prominent place during the harvest supper. But when the supper is over the guests tear the "kern-baby" to pieces, and whoever secures a fragment of the thus sacrificed harvest-queen is certain of another year of life and happiness.

Not less significant, though more picturesque, is a harvest-custom in Moldavia. When the harvest is reaped the young girls go into the fields and wail and lament until the midnight hour, the death of Summer and of the Corn, and, though perhaps, scarcely knowing it, the fleetness of Youth and the fragility of Beauty. But at the midnight hour the young men of the village come with joyful shouting and announce the beginning of the happy harvest-time. Each lad takes his lass home to a splendid harvest-feast and the death-wail of the lamenting maidens is quickly changed into a song of life and joy.

In some parts of France the last sheaf is cut by a young and beautiful girl, who must deny herself to all tenderness and carresses during the harvest-festivities. If she is successful the year will be abundantly blessed, and the harvest will go far; should she permit herself, however, to be kissed, then the outlook is threatening and the plenteousness of the harvest is spoiled, and here, too, the idea of sacrifice is underlying.

Among the most weird of these customs are the harvest-cries. The cry of the old Egyptian reaper, announcing the death of the corn-spirit, finds its echo on the world's harvest-fields until this day. Even in England the reapers in Devonshire utter cries of the same sort and go through a ceremony which in its main features is an exact counterpart of this old pagan form of worship. On a still autumn evening these harvest cries come from a dis-

tance with an uncanny effect, and the listener feels creep into his heart the strange awe produced by some elementary manifestation of the soul, not of an individual only or of a nation, but of Mankind itself.

Wherever we go—to what strange people our quest may lead, or into what remote ages our search may point—everywhere we find that Harvest is in some mysterious way the great festival of the supreme sacrifice—the sacrifice of life laid down that other life may be saved. Who does not remember the Indian legend of Mon-Daw-Min or the origin of Maize, a legend which Longfellow has forever preserved for us in *Hiawatha*. This is what the Indian folk-lore tells:

In times past a poor Indian was living with his wife and children in a beautiful country. But though he was poor, he was contented and thankful to the Great Spirit for everything he received.

His eldest son, Wunzh, inherited his disposition and prayed and fasted, and begged the Great Spirit not for a boon for himself, but for a blessing for his people. On the third day of his fast he became weak and faint and kept his bed. Thus lying, he saw a handsome young man coming down from the sky and advancing towards him. The celestial visitor, who was dressed in garments of green and yellow, with a plume of waving feathers on his head, invited Wunzh to get up and wrestle with him, and Wunzh did this, though weak from fasting. Three times he wrestled with the stranger who, after the third time, said: "You have won your desires of the Great Spirit. You have wrestled manfully. To-morrow I shall meet you and wrestle with you for the last time; when you have prevailed against me, strip off my garments and throw me down, clean the earth of roots and weeds, make it soft and bury me. After you have done this, leave my body in the earth and do not

disturb it, but come occasionally to visit the place, to see whether I have come to life, and let neither grass nor weeds grow on my grave. Once a month cover me with fresh earth. If you follow my instructions you will do good to your fellow-creatures by teaching them the knowledge I now teach you."

As the sky-visitor had foretold, so it happened. Wunzh prevailed against his angelic antagonist, threw him down, took from him his beautiful garments and plume, and finding him dead, buried him on the spot in the manner he had been told. He carefully visited the grave through the spring, weeded the grass and kept the ground soft and pliant, and very soon he saw the tops of the green plumes come through the earth. Days and weeks passed. Summer was now drawing towards a close, and when Autumn came there stood on the grave a tall and graceful plant with bright-colored silken hair, surmounted with nodding plumes and leaves, and golden clusters. "It is my friend," shouted the lad. "It is the friend of all mankind! It is Mondawmin!" Then he showed his people how the broad husks must be torn away, as he had stripped off the garments from the stranger, and all united in a feast of the newly-grown ears, in the harvest-feast of the corn.

So runs the Indian legend, again pointing to the pristine idea of sacrifice, that

so early seized upon the imagination of Man and has never left it.

And now a dark and grim reaper goes over the fields and gathers a harvest of young and hopeful lives. But though we mourn bitterly all this glorious promise of Youth stricken down on the harvest-field of Death, yet we hope and believe, as Mankind has hoped and believed in all ages and under all stars, that out of Death will come Life, larger and more bountiful in ultimate good to the race.

Though many of the harvest-fields are devastated; though instead of the cry of the reapers the roar of the cannon breaks the night silence; though war-balloons sail through the air followed by anxious and frightened glances, yet is our hope not slain. We feel that the supreme sacrifice made by the gallant Youth of war-scarred countries must not be in vain, that time must not be in vain, that a time must come when the bitterness of this Harvest shall be measured by the good that has come from it; when through this stupendous spending of life, new life shall have been conserved; when through loyalty to an ideal of duty those who put honor above safety shall have stopped a great wrong, and have helped on the development of those spiritual forces, which, finding expression in man, are, we still trust, raising the race to a higher plane.